

Service-Learning





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**Challenge school districts that
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Cupertino Unified School District
Los Angeles Unified School District
North Monterey County Unified
School District

Pasadena Unified School District
San Diego City Unified School
District

Visalia Unified School District

Introduction

The Challenge calls for us all—students, parents, educators, and communities—to embrace a simple but powerful concept: that we measure success by gains in student achievement based on standards.

—Delaine Eastin
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Enriched learning through service, service-learning, provides students with meaningful, relevant opportunities to fulfill the curriculum and citizenship mission of public education. Service-learning is a powerful teaching strategy that provides students with multiple ways to apply and demonstrate learning, to reinforce skills, and to develop socially. It teaches the principles of democratic participation and active citizenship. At the local, state, and national levels, service-learning is being recognized as a strategy for teaching and learning that reinforces school-improvement efforts.

In the past, children and young people learned a great deal at the sides of their fathers or mothers, within the context of their community of friends and neighbors. Young people used to assume greater and greater responsibility as they grew into adulthood. Over time, however, the classic agrarian models of apprenticeship and mentoring by adults have given way to the isolation of young people in youth-only educational, social, and employment groupings. Unlike earlier generations, many adults today tend to treat young people as objects, as problems, or as the recipients, not the deliverers, of services. Service-learning reverses these trends. When teachers integrate service into the curriculum, students are deeply immersed in the learning and, therefore, gain an individualized understanding of the concepts in the curricular subject areas. Students learn responsibility by being responsible. They have the opportunity to commu-

nicate, to solve problems, to think critically, and to exercise other higher-order skills when they play an active role in selecting and developing their own service-learning projects to benefit the community.

If responsibility for something larger than oneself is to remain an American ethic, it must be evident in educational institutions and communities. It must not become yet another fad with short-term hope and long-term disappointment. Thirty-five years ago, President John F. Kennedy issued a challenge to Americans: “Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.” Today that challenge is a warning that lessons forgotten are lessons that must be relearned.

In a democratic society, one of the basic purposes of public schools is to prepare students for active, informed citizenship. Part of being a responsible citizen is establishing and maintaining meaningful employment. An equally important part of citizenship is possessing the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to build a better world. The real world is full of real problems to solve, real letters to write, real laws waiting to be made, real surveys to analyze; the learning experiences that students are engaged in should be equally real.